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SUBJECT: INTSUM 531 - MARCH 29, 1978

LONDON FOR KINSOLVING

PARIS FOR NICHOLAS MURPHY
OTHER ADDRESSEES FOR CHIEFS OF MISSION

WARNING NOTICE SENSITIVE SOURCES AND METHODS INVOLVED NOT
RELEASABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS

1. ISRAEL. PRIME MINISTER BEGIN IS LIKELY TO GIVE AN IMPASSIONED DEFENSE OF HIS PEACE PROPOSALS BEFORE THE KNESSET TODAY IN AN EFFORT TO ORCHESTRATE ANOTHER SHOW OF COALITION SOLIDARITY IN THE FACE OF SHARP DIFFERENCES WITH THE US. BEGIN HAS ALREADY HAD SOME SUCCESS IN RALLYING PUBLIC SUPPORT AND BLAMING THE US FOR THE "FAILURE" OF HIS TALKS IN WASHINGTON.

2. SINCE SUNDAY'S DEMONSTRATION OF UNITY BY THE CABINET, COALITION MEMBERS HAVE LARGELY CLOSED RANKS BEHIND THE PRIME MINISTER AND DEFENDED HIS NEGOTIATING POSITION. BEGIN'S HAND HAS BEEN STRENGTHENED FURTHER BY PRESS REPORTS- APPARENTLY PLANTED BY THE ISRAELI FOREIGN MINISTRY- SUGGESTING THAT THE US HOPES TO ENGINEER HIS DOWNFALL.

3. AS A RESULT, DEFENSE MINISTER WEIZMAN'S CHALLENGE TO BEGIN HAS FIZZLED AND LEFT WEIZMAN AT LEAST TEMPORARILY ISOLATED. COALITION MODERATES REGARD WEIZMAN'S POWER PLAY AS PREMATURE AND EMBARRASSINGLY INEPT. THEY ARE IN NO MOOD TO CHALLENGE BEGIN AND OTHER HARD-LINERS IN THE
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MIDST OF A SERIOUS DISAGREEMENT WITH THE US.

4. DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER YADIN, THE HEAD OF THE MODERATE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT FOR CHANGE, STRONGLY DEFENDED BEGIN'S NEGOTIATING POSITION AT A PARTY MEETING ON MONDAY AND ACCUSED PRESIDENT CARTER OF GOING OUT OF HIS WAY NOT TO REACH AGREEMENT WITH BEGIN. SOME PARTY DOVES ARE URGING THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT TO BREAK WITH THE GOVERNMENT UNLESS IT MODIFIES ITS PEACE PROPOSALS, BUT AMNON RUBINSTEIN, A PROMINENT DOVE AND INFLUENTIAL FACTION LEADER, ARGUED AGAINST SUCH A MOVE AND URGED THE PARTY TO CONTINUE TO WORK WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT TO CHANGE ITS POLICIES.

5. THE OPPOSITION LABOR PARTY HAS LARGELY IGNORED WEIZMAN'S BID FOR A NATIONAL PEACE GOVERNMENT. RATHER THAN RALLYING BEHIND THE GOVERNMENT THIS TIME, IT IS MAKING A FEEBLE EFFORT TO PUT BEGIN ON THE DEFENSIVE. PARTY LEADERS REPORTEDLY HAVE DROPPED THEIR PLANS TO SUBMIT A NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION. INSTEAD THEY WILL PUT FORWARD A RESOLUTION DURING THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE TODAY TO EMPHASIZE THEIR DIFFERENCES WITH BEGIN OVER THE APPLICATION OF UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 242 TO THE WEST

BANK.

6. THE LABOR-ORIENTED PRESS AND THE RESPECTED INDEPENDENT HAARETZ ALSO HAVE CRITICIZED BEGIN. HAARETZ IS CALLING FOR A NATIONAL DEBATE; IT MAINTAINS THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S CLAIM OF A NATIONAL CONSENSUS FAVORING BEGIN'S POSITION IS INACCURATE. ON BALANCE, HOWEVER, THE PRESS THUS FAR HAS BLAMED THE US MORE THAN BEGIN FOR THE CURRENT IMPASSE. EVEN THE MODERATE JERUSALEM POST, WHILE CHARACTERIZING THE PRIME MINISTER AS OBDURATE AND OBTUSE, ARGUES THAT BEGIN DESERVES SUPPORT FOR RESISTING WASHINGTON'S "WRONG-HEADED" APPROACH. (CONFIDENTIAL)

7. LEBANON. EMBASSY BEIRUT REPORTED THAT A DELEGATION
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FROM NABATIYA WENT TO THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENT YESTERDAY AND DEMANDED THAT ALL NON-LEBANESE (PALESTINIAN) ARMED MEN LEAVE THE AREA AND THAT THE LEBANESE ARMY ENTER. THIS IS ONE MORE INDICATION THAT THE MUSLIMS OF LEBANON ARE GROWING TIRED OF THE PALESTINIAN PRESENCE. SUCH DEMONSTRATIONS MAY PRESSURE THE LEBANESE ARMY TO MOVE TO NABATIYA WHEN IT GOES SOUTH.

8. THE POPULATION OF SOUTHERN LEBANON HAS DWINDLED SHARPLY IN RECENT YEARS, BUFFETED FIRST BY THE CIVIL WAR AND NOW BY THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF MUCH OF THE REGION. WITH ISRAELI SUPPORT, LEBANESE CHRISTIANS ARE TRYING TO EXPAND THEIR CONTROL OVER THE REGION.

9. BEFORE 1975, THE POPULATION OF SOUTHERN LEBANON BELOW NABATIYAH WAS APPROXIMATELY 250,000. BY THE TIME OF THE ISRAELI INCURSION EARLIER THIS MONTH, IT HAD DECLINED TO 100,000. SINCE THEN, TENS OF THOUSANDS MORE REFUGEES HAVE FLED TOWARD BEIRUT, ADDING TO ITS ALREADY ENORMOUS ECONOMIC AND SECURITY PROBLEMS.

10. IN THE SPRING OF 1976, ISRAEL BEGAN SUPPLYING CHRISTIANS IN THE SOUTH WITH FOOD, WATER, FUEL, AND MEDICAL TREATMENT THROUGH FOUR DESIGNATED GATES OF THE FORMERLY CLOSED BORDER UNDER THE ISRAELI "GOOD FENCE" POLICY. BY SUMMER THEY WERE ALSO GIVING THE CHRISTIANS SOME MILITARY AID.

11. AS THE CIVIL WAR DREW TO AN END IN OCTOBER 1976, THE ISRAELIS ENCOURAGED THE CHRISTIANS TO EXPAND THEIR ENCLAVES IN THE SOUTH TO CREATE A "CORDON SANITAIRE" ALONG THE BORDER TO PREVENT SUCH PALESTINIAN TERRORIST RAIDS INTO ISRAEL AS THE ATTACKS ON MAALOT AND QIRYAT SHEMONA
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IN EARLY 1974. THE CHRISTIANS, WITH ISRAELI AID, SEIZED MARJI UYUN, BUT THEY WERE UNSUCCESSFUL IN THEIR ATTEMPT TO CAPTURE BINT JUBAYL IN OCTOBER. BY EARLY 1977 THE LINES OF CONTROL IN THE SOUTH HAD SETTLED INTO A STALEMATE DESPITE OCCASIONAL EFFORTS BY BOTH SIDES TO ENLARGE THEIR HOLDINGS.

12. ABOUT 2,000 TO 2,500 CHRISTIAN MILITIAMEN ARE NOW IN THE SOUTH, LOOSELY COMMANDED BY A LEBANESE OFFICER, MAJOR SAAD HADDAD. PRESS REPORTS INDICATE THAT THE CHRISTIANS ARE EXPANDING THEIR HOLDINGS BEHIND THE SHIELD OF THE ISRAELI PRESENCE. HADDAD HAS ANNOUNCED THAT HE INTENDS TO FORM A "LOCAL ARMY" IN THE SOUTH OF CHRISTIANS AND SHIA MUSLIMS TO GUARANTEE THE REGION'S SECURITY. EVEN IF HADDAD DOES RECRUIT MORE MILITIAMEN, THE CHRISTIANS-WITHOUT ISRAELI SUPPORT-ARE NO MATCH FOR THE PALESTINIANS.

13. ISRAEL IS AT LEAST TEMPORARILY IN CONTROL OF THIS KEY AREA. THE ISRAELIS NOW HOLD THAT PART OF LEBANON SOUTH OF A LINE RUNNING FROM HASBAYYA WEST TO THE LITANI RIVER ALL THE WAY TO THE COAST; THE PALESTINIANS HOLD A NARROW ENCLAVE AROUND TYRE. UN FORCES HAVE TAKEN UP POSITIONS AT TYRE AND AT BRIDGES OVER THE LITANI. (SECRET/NOFORN)

14. SYRIA. THE SYRIAN CABINET CHANGES ANNOUNCED ON MARCH 27 SEEM TO BE A FURTHER MANIFESTATION OF ASSAD'S EFFORTS TO REFURBISH HIS DOMESTIC IMAGE AMID SIGNS OF RENEWED DOMESTIC TURBULENCE. OFFICIAL SOURCES AFFIRMED THAT THE CABINET SHIFTS WOULD NOT "CHANGE SYRIA'S ARAB AND INTERNATIONAL POLICY." TO UNDERLINE THIS CONTINUITY, SYRIAN SOURCES HAVE INDICATED THAT KHADDAM, DEFENSE MINISTER TLASS, AND INFORMATION MINISTER AHMAD WILL RETAIN THEIR PORTFOLIOS.

15. THE SELECTION OF MUHAMMAD ALI HALABI AS THE NEW PRIME MINISTER IS A LOGICAL FULFILLMENT OF ASSAD'S IN-SECRET

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AUGURAL PLEDGE EARLIER THIS MONTH TO EXPAND HIS PROGRAM OF LIBERALIZATION. AS SPEAKER OF THE SYRIAN PARLIAMENT, HALABI WAS EXPOSED TO A WIDER RANGE OF INTERNAL POLITICAL VIEWS THAN MANY OF HIS COLLEAGUES IN THE BAATH PARTY COMMAND. SUFFICIENTLY POPULAR IN PARLIAMENT TO OBTAIN REGULAR REELECTION AS SPEAKER, HALABI WILL BE EXPECTED TO BROADEN THE REGIME'S BASE OF SUPPORT BY BRINGING NEW

POLITICAL GROUPINGS INTO THE RULING ESTABLISHMENT.

16. ASSAD WILL BE MONITORING HALABI'S PERFORMANCE TO ENSURE THAT THE PRESIDENTIAL MANDATE IS PROPERLY IMPLEMENTED. ASSAD IS WELL AWARE THAT HIS DIRECTIVES TO HALABI'S PREDECESSOR TO STIMULATE THE LETHARGIC BUREAUCRACY AND ROOT OUT CORRUPTION EVENTUALLY BACKFIRED AGAINST THE REGIME. AS A RESULT OF THIS EXPERIENCE, THE NEW CABINET'S PROGRAMS WILL AVOID PROJECTS THAT MIGHT EXACERBATE TENSIONS AMONG ASSAD'S KEY LIEUTENANTS.

17. ASSAD'S MOTIVE FOR REMOVING NAJI JAMIL AS COMMANDER OF THE AIR FORCE IS LESS CLEAR. HE COULD BE A POLITICAL VICTIM OF THE SECTARIAN TENSIONS WHICH HAVE AROUSED SYRIA'S ALAWITE COMMUNITY. EMBASSY DAMASCUS NOTED THAT LOCAL SOURCES BELIEVE THAT JAMIL LOST OUT TO ASSAD'S BROTHER RIFAT IN A POWER STRUGGLE WITHIN THE REGIME. THE REMOVAL OF JAMIL THUS MAY BE PART OF ASSAD'S EFFORTS TO FORESTALL THE EMERGENCE OF RIVALS FROM THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT. IN LATE JANUARY, ASSAD SHIFTED TWO POPULAR SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS TO PROVINCIAL GOVERNORSHIPS, REPORTEDLY TO BLOCK THE FORMATION OF INDIVIDUAL POWER BASES WITHIN THE OFFICER CORPS.

18. IN SUM, ASSAD SEEMS TO BE SEEKING TO STRENGTHEN THE ABILITY OF HIS REGIME TO WITHSTAND INCREASING DOMESTIC
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PRESSURES. HOWEVER, CONTINUING SECTARIAN STRAINS, EXACERBATED BY RECENT ATTACKS ON PROMINENT ALAWITES, MAY UNDERMINE THIS EFFORT, AS WELL AS ASSAD'S POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION PROGRAM. (SECRET) COOPER

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